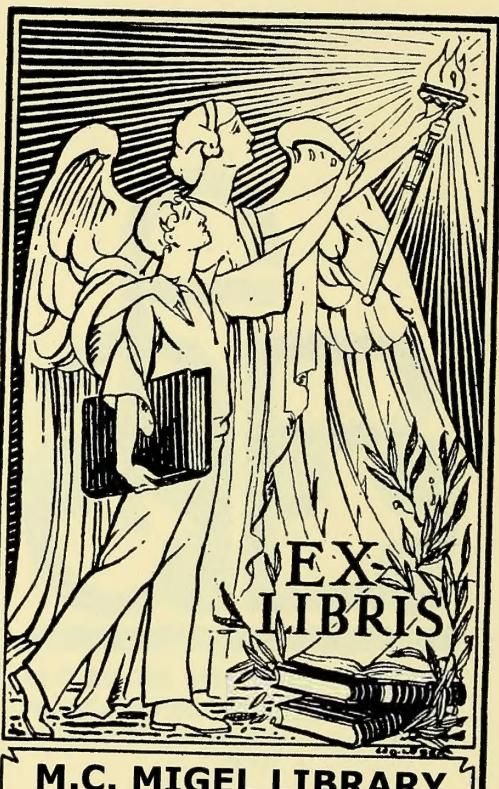


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INFORMATION ON THE SITUATION OF THE VISUALLY  
HANDICAPPED IN POLAND.

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HOUSE FOR THE BLIND

## Information

### on the Situation of the Visually Handicapped in Poland

After the World War II the blind in the Polish Peoples Republic resumed their activity aiming at establishing their own, uniform, autonomous organization by turning the then existing numerous charitable institutions and regional organizations of disabled persons.

Thanks to the favourable conditions which had been offered by the new social structure, in 1951 their endeavours were crowned with success and the Polish Union of the Blind was organized. A few years later, the economic activity of the Union was turned over to the specially organized for this purpose Union of Cooperatives of the Blind. At present, the whole activity of the blind is concentrated in those two Unions.

The Polish Union of the Blind is the sole organization which represents the interests of all the visually handicapped in Poland. According to the record on 31st December, 1963 there were in Poland 15,300 blind persons, of which 12,435 were the members of the Union. The Union carries neither charitable nor economic activity, and nearly all its funds come from the appropriations made by the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs which performs authority supervision over the activity of the Union.

The prime task of the Union is to associate all visually handicapped and to represent their interests, and in particular to secure for them adequate living conditions, to improve their general and vocational education, to organize social and vocational rehabilitation, to perform cultural, educational and recreational activity, to provide conditions for adequate rest, etc. In this activity the Union closely co-operates with the central and local state authorities and with a number of

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social establishments and organisations, among others with the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Ministry of Education /within the scope of teaching blind children/, Union of Cooperatives of the Blind, local government authorities, etc.

The superior authority of the Union is its Central Board domiciled in Warsaw. It heads 17 District Boards in all the provinces, and these, in turn, head about 200 local units /circles and groups/. In this way the whole country is covered by the activity of the Union. The officers of the Union consist of blind persons who are elected at all levels. Directly subordinated to the Central Board in Warsaw are the Braille Printing House, Central Braille Library, Talking Book Studio, Recreation Home for the Blind at Muszyna, Rehabilitation Centre for Newly Blind Persons, and Typhological Centre /with breeding, education, vocational training, and welfare divisions/.

The blind in Poland enjoy a number of privileges among which it is well worth to mention the following:

- employed blind persons and cooperatives of the blind are completely exempt from the fiscal tax;
- tax reductions for blind farmers;
- all the members of the Union and the families on their upkeep are entitled to avail themselves of the public health service free of charge;
- immunity from telephone and radio subscription charges;
- free travel by railway and bus on the territory of the whole country for guides and persons accompanying the members of the Union, as well as free of charge travel by public city communication facilities for the blind and their guides;
- unrepayable doles given by the Union and local authorities to blind



- persons who are not employed and require financial assistance;
- free of charge general and vocational training;
- partly repayable allowance in the form of tape recorders, watches, white canes, guide dogs, etc.

The services rendered by the Union in 1963 are illustrated by the following figures:

#### 1. Breeding and education

- There were organized 35 Braille writing courses completed by 320 blind persons; further 50 blind persons being taught individually.
- Primary school teaching included 80 grown up blind persons.
- Secondary schools of different types were attended by 190 blind persons, and 40 blind persons studied at the universities. Apart of the assistance afforded by the State, all the studying blind persons obtained reader scholarships and material assistance from the Union.
- The teaching of blind children was performed in 7 special schools subordinated to the Ministry of Education. The assistance of the Union consisted in giving the pupils indispensable educational equipment.
- As every year there were organized summer camps for blind children and rest camps for the students of secondary schools and universities.
- The local units performed their activities in:
  - 70 reading rooms /amusements, lectures, chats, etc./;
  - 40 music teams;
  - 15 chorus groups;
  - 16 recitation groups;



- 45 sport groups /swimming, gymnastics, canoeing, tourism, chess/

In the activity of the above mentioned groups and teams participated about 1300 blind persons.

## 2. Publishing activity

The Central Board publishes 3 different types of periodicals for the youth and grown up, both popular and expert /among others for cooperators, musicians and experts/. Moreover, it publishes schoolbooks. In 1963 there were printed in total 24,000 of metal plates which served to make over 1,000,000 of copies.

## 3. Activity of the Central Braille Library

The Central Braille Library has 35 regional centres.

The collection of the Library consists of:

7,500 titles of Braille books in 27,000 volumes.

1,000 titles of Braille music books in 1,600 volumes.

250 talking books on tapes.

980 black print vocational books.

In 1963 about 2,500 permanent readers availed themselves of the services of the Library.

## 4. Rehabilitation of newly blind persons and those losing their sight

Sixty persons availed themselves of the services of the Rehabilitation Centre in Warsaw. There were organized three-month courses for men and women. The programme comprised psychological testing, medical examinations, teaching of Braille writing and to write on black print machine, spatial orientation and cane travel, performance of everyday activities /cooking, tidying up, sewing, baby nursing, etc/, use of rehabilitation equipment, improvement of general knowledge, practice in workshops, etc.



The graduates were directed for further vocational training in compliance with their liking and capabilities.

Furthermore, there was opened in Warsaw the first district consulting centre providing rehabilitation and social guidance for blind persons who are beyond the Centre.

There is planned a similar Rehabilitation centre for blind persons living in the country.

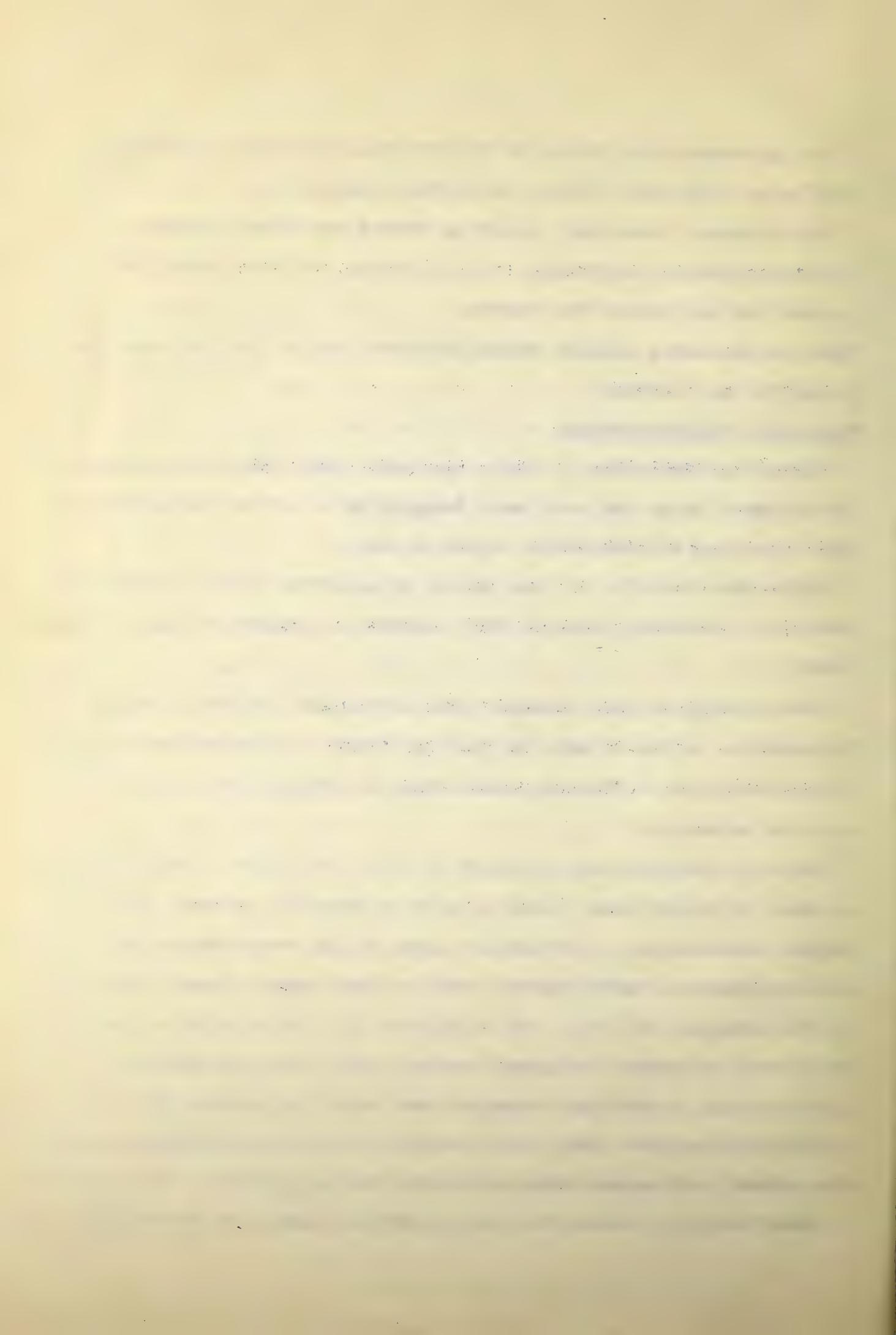
#### Employment Possibilities

Before the First World War about 150,000 blind persons had earned their keep, the rest went begging or lived at the expense of their families or charitable organizations.

After the World War II the number of employed blind persons was constantly increasing and in 1963 reached an impressive figure of 6,000.

The majority of the visually handicapped are employed in the Cooperatives of the Blind. In 1963 the Union of Cooperatives of the Handicapped, domiciled in Warsaw, associated 23 cooperatives situated all over the country.

The said cooperatives employed in 1963 over 4,000 visually handicapped, of which about 1,800 persons by domestic system. Both the cooperatives and the individual blind persons have at their disposal the following institutions: residential, educational, medical, cultural, sports, social and economic. They have their own residential buildings erected from their own funds and provided with up-to-date material and social equipment. The cooperatives provide their members with an extensive welfare, medical, educational and recreational activity. The cooperatives also have a special branch for single blind persons and blind persons



Cooperatives of blind people of the Lublin region, their members handicapped are trained for their work at the Institute for Vocational Training Center, which is also engaged in the training of blind people. Many of the blind are employed in cooperatives. Recently, the cooperatives carry on their work under the name of the Association of Blind Cooperatives. As regards the Lublin branch, it already has two trained blind workers. The Lublin Association of the Blind, founded in 1962, includes blind people who live alongside盲人, especially in the Polish Union of the Blind. The members of the cooperatives are all blind people or members of the Polish Union of the Blind.

The cooperatives of the blind are busy on such work as knitting, making, electrotechnical assembly /electronics, etc./, repairing electrical equipment, metal forming, furniture making, plastic and paperboard products, etc. They often work in collaboration with the local industry, in particular in the field of assembly and electrotechnical work.

In 1963 the number of registered blind people in Poland was 10,000.

### Blindness of the blind

In the social life and commerce

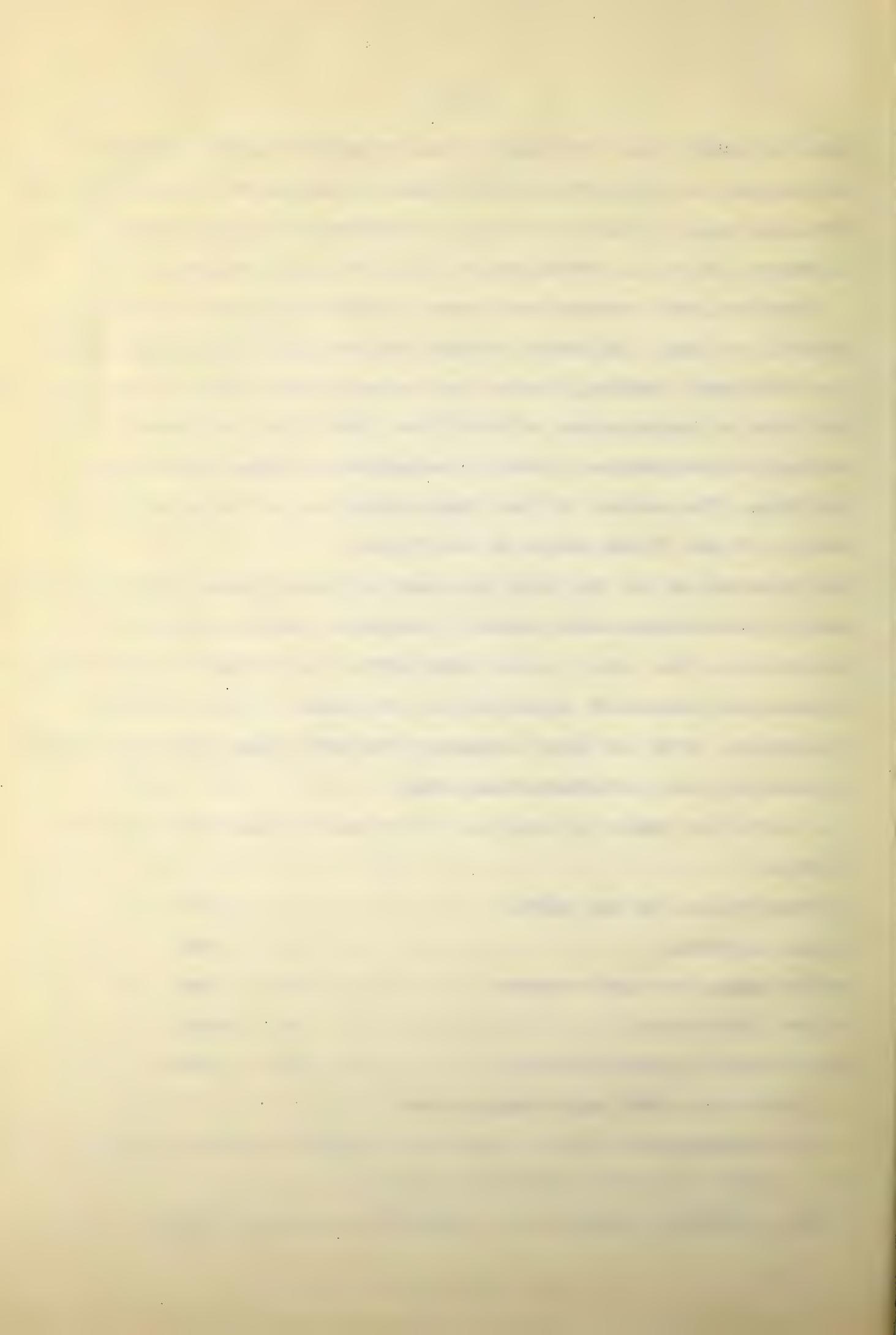
in the organization

of different associations

Responsible for blind organizations

The blind blind people are utilized in commerce by the Ministry of Finance and State Banks.

The number of registered blind persons in Poland is 10,000.



## 6. Welfare activity

In 1963 the Polish Union of the Blind distributed among visually handicapped:

- 400 orders to sanatoriums;
- 1,960 orders to an own recreation centre;
- 30 orders to recreation homes abroad;
- 20 guide dogs;
- 850 Braille wrist watches;
- 1,500 white canes;
- 20 tape recorders;
- 140 Braille thermometers;

and a number of other assistance equipment, e.g. needles, tailors' and joiner's rules, etc.

Moreover, thanks to the endeavours of the Union, 120 blind persons obtained new flats.

At the end of 1963 the National Congress of the Delegates of the Polish Union of the Blind took place and new officers were elected, as well as the guide lines were worked out for the next five years of the activity of the Union. During the present term the attention of the Union authorities will be concentrated, first of all, on the complex rehabilitation of the blind living in the country and in small towns, with simultaneous further extension of the services within the scope of breeding, education, rehabilitation, and vocational training of the visually handicapped, as well as protection against blindness and extensive propaganda among people who have no eye troubles.

Warsaw, March, 1964.



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